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GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT:

Education is a basic right that everyone, regardless of gender, should be able to access. One of the largest education systems in the world is found in India, where colleges and universities, along with basic, middle, secondary, and upper secondary schools, are crucial to honing the people's general personalities. But history clearly shows that girls have encountered many obstacles in their pursuit of an education. These days, it is imperative to address the major obstacles and issues that arise when girls enter the middle of their education. The study's primary goal is to highlight the different government-framed policies and talk about the significant obstacles facing girls' education. A big concern nowadays is giving girls' education top priority in order to build a more inclusive and equitable society. India will not succeed by ingratiating itself with the gender-biased society. The only thing that can make them powerful is education. Initiatives promoting education and awareness play a crucial role in challenging gender norms, paving the way for a more equitable and tolerant society. The problem and the obstacles to education they encounter are closely examined in this paper. The paper is framed by using various information sources comprising books, magazines, and different websites. By maximizing the many available data sources, secondary sources were used to gather the data. The paper also offers some recommendations for overcoming these obstacles.

KEYWORDS: Gender, equity, education

INTRODUCTION:

A key component of attaining equality and social justice is gender parity in education. Globally, gender differences in educational access, opportunity, and outcomes continue despite notable advancements in recent decades. This is not only a problem with enrollment rates; it also involves things like educational quality, student retention, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) field representation. It is impossible to overestimate the significance of gender parity in education since it not only helps people realize their full potential but also

promotes social cohesion, innovation, and economic progress. Through dismantling obstacles to education and tackling structural disparities, communities can unleash the potential and contributions of every person, irrespective of gender.

OBJECTIVES:

The following are the objectives of the paper:

1. To highlight the different government-framed policies regarding the education of girls.
2. To discuss the significant obstacles facing girls' education.
3. To give recommendations for overcoming the obstacles regarding gender equity in education.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES REGARDING THE EDUCATION OF GIRLS:

Gender inequality must be addressed, and advancement of society depends heavily on government policy pertaining to girls' education. Understanding the importance of educating girls as a driver of social change, economic expansion, and gender parity, governments everywhere have launched a range of programs and policies targeted at increasing educational opportunities, raising educational standards, and removing obstacles that prevent girls from participating in and succeeding in school. The following are the various government policies which have been framed regarding the education of the girls.

❖ Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):

The government of India launched Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme in 2015 to address the concerns about gender discrimination and women empowerment in the country. It translates to 'Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child'. The main objective of the scheme was to improve the child sex ratio, ensure gender equality and encourage education and participation of the girl child. Various other initiatives were taken by the district in essence of this scheme such as 'Udaan- Sapne Di Duniya Se Rubaru', 'Lakshya Se Rubaru,' Aao School Chalein' 'My Aim My Target Campaign' etc.

❖ The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (RTE):

The RTE Act, 2009 incorporates the word 'free and compulsory'. It is a legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, meaning thereby that "every child has a right to a full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards". This Act came into force from April 1, 2010 and provides for:

- Appointment of appropriately trained teachers.
- Prohibits physical punishment and mental harassment.
- Lays down norms and standards relating to school working days, teacher-working hours.
- To improve the quality of education, teacher-student ratio should be fixed.
- Basic infrastructural facilities including school building, teaching staff and learning equipment's.

This Act is an attempt to provide an equal access to education for both boys and girls at school level. It creates a better environment for girl students to feel equal and a motivation for them in learning new things that will lead to their holistic development.

❖ **National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship (NMMS) Scheme:**

This scheme provides financial assistance to students from economically weaker sections to pursue their higher education. It was launched in 2008. One lakh scholarships are awarded to selected students of class 9th every year. The amount of scholarship is 12,000 rupees per annum. The Cabinet has approved for continuation of this scheme till FY2025-26.

❖ **Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan (SSA):**

It is a flagship programme of Government of India launched in 2001 that provides a universal access and retention, bridging of social gaps in elementary education. The main objectives of this Abhiyan are:

- Primary education to all children.
- Promotion of girl child education at primary level.
- Holistic view of education with significant implications for curriculum, teacher education, planning and management.
- Reducing gender disparities.

❖ **Mahila Samakhya:**

The Mahila Samakhya programme was launched in 1988 by MHRD (Ministry of Human Resource Development) focusing for education and empowerment in rural areas. This scheme provides for enhancing self-esteem and confidence among students, building a positive image of women, developing critical thinking, fostering decision making, providing information and skill for overall economic development etc.

❖ **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV):**

Bringing gender and social gaps at all levels, KGBV is such an arrangement for girls who belong either to SC (Scheduled Castes), ST (Scheduled Tribes) or OBC (Other Backward Class) for setting up schools at upper primary levels and Girls Hostel till Secondary level has been extended. It was launched in 2004 and is being implemented in almost all the states of the country. "These vidyalayas can be opened by the GOI in educationally backward blocks of India where the female rural literacy is below the national average and the gender gap in literacy is higher than the national average". (Tyagi, 2010).

SIGNIFICANT OBSTACLES FACING GIRLS' EDUCATION:

Despite significant progress in recent years, girls' education continues to face numerous obstacles that hinder their access, participation, and success in schooling. These obstacles are often

deeply rooted in social, cultural, economic, and political factors, and addressing them is essential for achieving gender equality in education and beyond. Some of the significant obstacles facing girls' education include:

1. Gender-Based Discrimination: Discrimination based on gender remains a pervasive barrier to girls' education in many parts of the world. Deeply entrenched social norms and stereotypes often prioritize boys' education over girls', leading to unequal opportunities and resources for girls. Gender-based discrimination manifests in various forms, including limited access to schooling, early marriage, gender-based violence, and expectations of domestic responsibilities, all of which disproportionately affect girls' ability to attend and succeed in school.

2. Poverty: Poverty is a significant barrier to girls' education, particularly in low-income countries and marginalized communities. Families living in poverty often face financial constraints that prevent them from sending their daughters to school. Additionally, girls from impoverished backgrounds may be forced to contribute to household income through domestic work or informal employment, limiting their ability to attend school regularly or complete their education.

3. Distance and Safety Concerns: In many regions, girls face challenges related to the physical distance between their homes and schools, as well as safety concerns associated with traveling to and from school. Lack of transportation infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, can make it difficult for girls to access schools located far from their homes. Moreover, concerns about safety, including the risk of harassment, violence, or abduction during the commute to school, often discourage parents from allowing their daughters to attend school, particularly as they reach adolescence.

4. Child Marriage and Early Pregnancy: Child marriage and early pregnancy are significant barriers to girls' education, particularly in regions where these practices are prevalent. Girls who are married off at a young age are often forced to drop out of school to assume adult responsibilities, such as household chores and childcare. Early pregnancy can also result in school dropout due to societal stigma, lack of support services, and limited access to reproductive health education and resources.

5. Lack of Gender-Sensitive Policies and Resources: Inadequate attention to gender-sensitive policies, curricula, and resources within educational systems perpetuates inequalities and reinforces gender stereotypes. Girls may face discriminatory practices within schools, such as biased teaching methods, lack of access to gender-segregated sanitation facilities, and limited availability of menstrual hygiene management resources. Moreover, the absence of comprehensive sexuality education and reproductive health services further exacerbates barriers to girls' education.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES REGARDING GENDER EQUITY IN EDUCATION:

The following recommendations have been proposed for overcoming the obstacles regarding gender equity in education:

- 1. Encourage Gender-Sensitive Policies:** Governments must give top priority to the creation and execution of gender-sensitive laws that cater to the particular requirements and difficulties that girls encounter in the classroom. This entails actions to end discrimination based on gender, provide equitable access to education, and offer assistance to groups of people who are particularly in need, such as girls from underrepresented communities, girls with disabilities, and girls displaced or affected by violence.
- 2. Invest in Girls' Education:** Governments and donors should put more money toward supporting programs, teacher training, infrastructure development, scholarships, and other forms of assistance for young women. It is a wise investment in the future of societies to support girls' education since it has a substantial positive impact on social development, economic growth, and health outcomes.
- 3. Address Socioeconomic Barriers:** In order to achieve gender parity in education, it is imperative that efforts be directed at addressing socioeconomic obstacles that disproportionately impact girls, such as child labor, poverty, and limited access to essential resources. In order to promote girls' enrollment and retention in school, this may entail offering financial incentives or conditional cash transfers to families. It may also entail putting targeted interventions into place to deal with the underlying causes of poverty and inequality.
- 4. Empower Communities and Parents:** Promoting girls' education and combating damaging gender norms and stereotypes depend heavily on community and parental involvement. Governments and organizations ought to collaborate with local communities in order to overcome cultural barriers, increase public knowledge of the value of girls' education, and involve parents in the decision-making process regarding their daughters' education.
- 5. Upgrade School Infrastructure and Safety:** Building gender-segregated restrooms, secure transit, and sufficient security measures are just a few of the infrastructure improvements that governments ought to give top priority. For girls to feel comfortable and confident going to school, especially in areas where safety concerns are common, a safe and encouraging learning environment is crucial.
- 6. Establish Comprehensive Support Services:** Governments should offer comprehensive support services in educational settings to address particular issues including child marriage,

early pregnancy, and managing menstrual hygiene. In addition to steps to stop and address gender-based abuse and harassment, this may entail having access to menstrual hygiene supplies, counseling services, and reproductive health information.

- 7. Encourage Girls' Leadership and Participation:** Gender equity initiatives in education should provide girls the tools they need to take on leadership roles and be engaged members of their communities and schools. Initiatives like student-led advocacy groups, leadership programs for females, and chances for girls to participate in community and school decision-making processes can help achieve this.

CONCLUSION:

In addition to being an issue of social fairness, achieving gender parity in education is a need for long-term growth and advancement. By tackling the structural impediments and roadblocks that prevent girls from pursuing an education, countries may unleash the potential of fifty percent of their people and build more just and inclusive communities. Targeted initiatives that address the particular needs and difficulties experienced by girls, such as poverty, discrimination, cultural norms, and safety concerns, must be given top priority in efforts to advance gender parity in education. Governments, communities, civil society organizations, and international partners must work together to implement comprehensive policies and initiatives that empower girls, challenge gender stereotypes, and foster environments that support their academic success in order to achieve gender equity. By offering equal educational opportunities for girls and ensuring equal opportunities for all, we can build a brighter future where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to the advancement of society. The imperative to educate girls is not merely an issue of academic pursuit but a fundamental human right that has far-reaching implications for individual empowerment, societal progress, and global development. The barriers to girls' access to education are multifaceted, deeply ingrained, and vary across regions, cultures, and socio-economic strata. However, the benefits of overcoming these barriers are equally diverse and transformative, ranging from improved health outcomes and economic development to enhanced social cohesion and gender equality.

Moreover, economic factors often serve as formidable barriers to girls' education. Poverty remains a significant impediment, limiting families' ability to invest in education, particularly for girls. Governments and international organizations must prioritize policies and programs that alleviate economic burdens on families, such as cash transfer schemes and scholarships specifically designed to benefit girls. Furthermore, the private sector can contribute by supporting initiatives that provide vocational training and skill development for girls, preparing them for meaningful participation in the workforce.

Education systems themselves also need reform to ensure they are inclusive and gender-

sensitive. Curricula should be designed to challenge stereotypes and promote diverse role models, fostering an environment where girls feel represented and encouraged to pursue their academic interests. Teacher training programs should incorporate gender-sensitive pedagogy to create classrooms that are inclusive and supportive of all students. Additionally, schools must address issues of safety and security, ensuring that girls can attend school without fear of harassment or violence.

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